

James Reston Says:

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Real Power Remains in White House Staff

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Washington — Even after the reshuffle of the Nixon Administration, which was supposed to strengthen the cabinet and reduce the authority of the White House staff, it is fairly clear that the strong, bold and assertive men are still working at 1600 Pennsylvania ave.

With the possible exceptions of the secretary of agriculture and the secretary of labor, there is nobody in the cabinet with a powerful political following of his own. Even these two are highly controversial men with the leaders of the farm and labor movements,

In the White House, however, former Secretary of Defense Laird has independent influence within the Republican Party, and with the Democratic committee chairmen in Congress. And John Connally of Texas, as a potential presidential nominee in 1976, has strong support in the business community and in the South.

Even More Influence

If anything, the Pentagon is likely to have even more influence with the new White House team than it had with the old. Laird, in charge of domestic policy; Gen. Alexander Haig, former deputy chief of staff of the Army, as Mr. Nixon's White House chief of staff, backed by Mr. Nixon and Connally, are a formidable combination in the coming battles over the military and domestic budgets.

In any discussion over the reordering of priorities over the next year, these men are likely to be strongly nationalistic, pro-Pentagon, and in the present weakened state of the dollar and U. S. trade, more protectionist than the Presi-

dent. This may bring them into conflict not only with Secretary of State Rogers, but with Henry Kissinger.

Haig's thesis these days is that the balance of power within the executive branch of the Government is going to shift from the White House staff to the cabinet. But it is hard to imagine that suddenly George Shultz at Treasury is going to have his own way with Laird or Connally; or that Rogers and Schlesinger at State and Defense, will have more influence with the President than Kissinger and Haig.

The manners and procedures of the President are changing. There will undoubtedly be more cabinet meetings and more open discussion of policy alternatives within the cabinet, but the real shift in the balance of power is likely to come within the White House staff itself.

The problem here, which contributed so much to the present crisis of the Nixon Administration, is that both the cabinet and the White House staff were not only loyal to the President but intimidated by him. He didn't have a "cabinet" but a politburo, and while members of the cabinet were minimized or ignored, the old White House staff was not his partner but his servant.

All this is likely to change now. Laird and Connally will not play the role of Haldeman and Ehrlichman. They have spent all their mature lives in elective politics and they respect the Congress.

Connally and Laird are unlike Haldeman and Ehrlichman, in that their future



John B. Connally

careers don't depend on doing the President's bidding, or doing what they think he might want them to do—like bugging, burglarizing, or sabotaging the opposition.

The President has done what he had to do in the last few weeks—but no more.

He has changed his White House staff and his cabinet, but decisive executive power still lies in the White House. It does not lie in the cabinet, but with the President, Laird, Connally, Haig and Kissinger—and deciding what to do about prices, and inflation, and the dollar crisis, while the Watergate scandal goes on, will be a hard and critical test for the new Nixon team.